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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 1996

CC Docket 96-45
26 SENATORS
LETTER
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Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

Dear Members of the Joint Board,

As the Joint Board develops its recommendations on universal service and implementation of the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey (SREK) amendment, we urge you to act decisively to fulfill the Congressionally-mandated and enacted goals of the amendment to provide affordable access to schools, libraries, and rural health care providers.

Passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 reaffirmed our nation's commitment to universal service. This historic act also specifically expands the universal service concept to include special services for schools, libraries, and rural health care providers, an essential step for the country as we enter the next century.

We believe that affordable access for these community users to telecommunications services are equally important to consumers as affordable rates. Our country cannot afford to create a division between "haves" and "have nots" in the Information Age when it comes to the educational uses of schools and libraries, along with the life-saving and other opportunities for rural areas through telemedicine. That is the basis for inclusion of the SREK amendment in the Act, and we believe its effective implementation is vital to the nation's interests in this next era of telecommunications.

We understand and share your concern about telephone rates; but as experts predict and the Act envisions, competition should drive down all prices, making affordable rates for community users fully obtainable. We believe that both reasonable rates and public access can and must be provided through a Universal Service Fund that provides the necessary support for the users specified by SREK.

To achieve the goals of the Telecommunications Act, which was passed by Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support and signed into law by President Clinton, the Joint Board must develop strong guidelines that fulfill its intent:

1) The Joint Board must ensure that technology is deployed into classrooms and to libraries at affordable rates, with discounts that are real, significant and meaningful. Affordability must be defined so that the discounted rates are related to a school's or library's ability to pay. Discounts must also consider if the school or library is in a rural or high cost area and ensure affordable access for all eligible schools and libraries.

2) For schools, we believe that connecting the classrooms is necessary to truly enhance education so connectivity should be defined to include internal connections, in ways that are technology neutral. It is also important to offer the widest range of special services that include distance learning.

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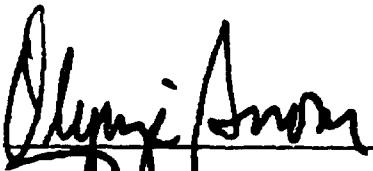



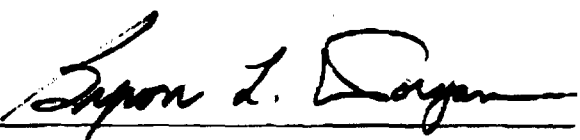
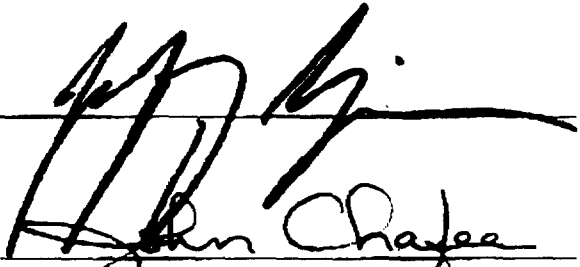
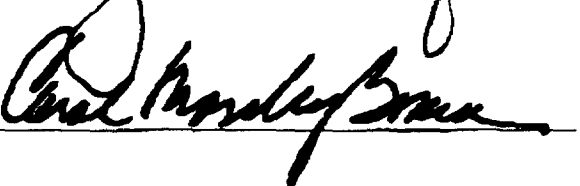
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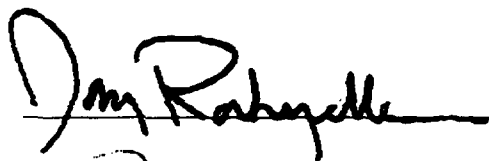
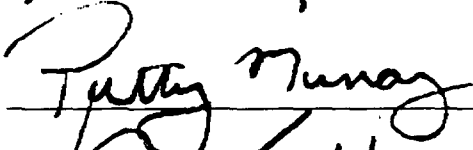
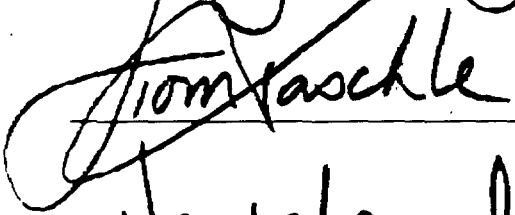
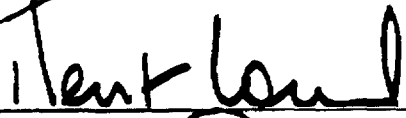
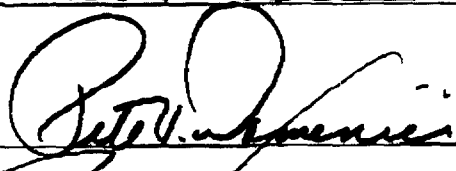
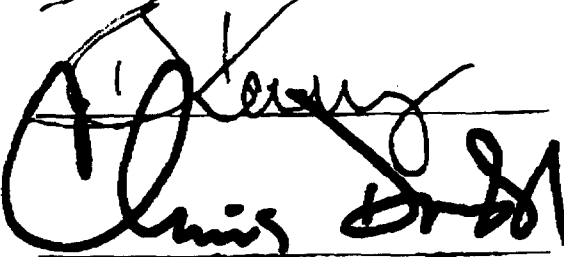

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Bold implementation of universal service, including the SREK amendment will help every American citizen have access to fundamental information and promote the important value of stronger communities. We are hopeful that you will play an instrumental role in fulfilling this historic opportunity and Congressional mandate by developing regulations that deliver on the promise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

We thank you for your hard work and commitment.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyder

Bob Olin

Jeff Egan

Allen Gsch

Al Simpson

Edward M. Kennedy

Barbara

Nancy London Tassebaum

John T. King

J. Wilson